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ABSTRACT

This document focuses on the education of secondary level English language learners within mainstream social studies classes. It provides teachers and teacher educators with an understanding of how mainstream social studies instruction can be designed and implemented to enhance academic achievement for these students. Research for this report included an extensive search of various databases and World Wide Web sites; analysis of the national content standards documents for history and three other core areas; site visits to a suburban high school that used a team teaching approach to working with English language learners enrolled in mainstream classes; and personal interviews with education faculty at George Washington University who are responsible for preparing preservice teachers for secondary level mainstream instruction. After an introduction, the first section discusses social studies content standards. The second section describes how to make social studies content accessible to English language learners, including: adopt a flexible, thematic-based curriculum; give students adequate time to learn social studies content; link social studies concepts to prior knowledge; accommodate a variety of learning styles; and use cooperative learning strategies. The third section discusses linking instruction to assessment. The fourth section looks at characteristics of effective mainstream teacher preparation. (Contains 36 references.) (SM)

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WASHINGTON DC

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Preparing Secondary Education Teachers to Work with English Language Learners:

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June 1999

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Overview

This document is number three of a series of four reports prepared under contract by the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) in response to task order number D0003 for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs. In accordance with the task order requirements, this report integrates findings from research pertaining to content area instruction for English language learners. Three key questions outlined in the task order are addressed:

- What does the relevant literature pertaining to content area instruction of linguistically and culturally diverse learners (LCDLs) contribute to the theory and practice of standards for LCDLs?
- What does the relevant literature pertaining to content area instruction of LCDLs contribute to the theory and practice of measures of achievement, proficiency, and/or academic literacy for LCDLs?
- What does the relevant literature pertaining to content area instruction of LCDLs contribute to the field of promising practices in content area instruction for LCDLs?

The focus of this third report is on the education of secondary-level English language learners within mainstream Social Studies classes. The intent of this document is to give teachers and teacher educators a better understanding of how mainstream Social Studies instruction can be designed and implemented to enhance academic achievement for these students.

Research for the report included an extensive search of the NCBE bibliographic database, the ERIC bibliographic database and various World Wide Web sites for information regarding effective curriculum and instruction, content standards, student assessment, teacher training and education.

In addition, the national content standards documents for history (*National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience, grades 5-12*) and three other core areas (language arts, math, science) were analyzed to determine whether their theoretical bases were consistent with what educational research tells us is effective practice for English language learners.

Information was also collected through site visits to a suburban high school that had implemented a team teaching approach for working with English language learners

enrolled in mainstream classrooms. Observations from the visit lend context to the discussion of exemplary instructional and curricular models.

Finally, personal interviews were held with education faculty at The George Washington University (GW) in Washington, DC who are responsible for preparing pre-service teachers for mainstream instruction at the secondary level. Kathleen Steeves, Ph.D., of GW provided valuable insights into current issues related to Social Studies education; her comments are interwoven throughout the report.

Introduction

Since 1983, when the report *A Nation at Risk* was issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the academic curriculum of our nation's schools has been increasingly guided by standards set at the national, state, and local levels. National academic standards are now in place for most fields, including English language arts, history, science, and mathematics. State and local education agencies have followed suit with their own set of guidelines tied to local needs and populations (Chris Green & Solis, 1997).

One of the troublesome issues for standards developers has been the question of whether or not to accommodate the needs of culturally diverse English language learners (ELLs) by setting different standards, allowing native language use in testing, or making similar adjustments in curricula and materials. Unlike their English-speaking peers, students who are struggling with the slow and difficult process of acquiring English face the combined task of learning new academic content while also learning new vocabulary, linguistic structures, and styles of academic discourse (McKeon, 1994). Therefore, setting common academic standards for all students does not guarantee that these students will have equal access to challenging academic content, or can meet the standards that have been set.

Giving every student the opportunity to meet high standards is only possible when effective educational practices are combined with qualified teachers and supportive schools. Too many ELL students spend all or most of their time in mainstream classes, without special instruction and where their teachers have not been given the necessary training in making language and content accessible. It is important to consider the implications of content standards for these students, along with the teacher behaviors and instructional approaches that will garner success. The next two sections discuss these issues within the context of secondary Social Studies instruction and the national U.S. history standards. Concluding sections examine the characteristics of fair and meaningful assessment and effective teacher preparation programs. The primary

focus throughout is on effective instruction for ELL students within mainstream secondary classrooms, and effective preparation and training for mainstream secondary teachers.

Social Studies Content Standards

> Social studies is the integrated study of social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994).

National standards for U.S. history bring together several areas of social studies, including world and U.S. history, geography, civics and economics, under the umbrella of historical understanding. Each of these areas, or "spheres of human activity" is addressed within ten eras encompassing the whole of American history from its pre-European beginnings to contemporary times. The national history standards emphasize that what is meant by historical understanding is much more than the passive absorption of facts, dates, names and places. Rather, a broad understanding of history means that students can engage in historical thinking—the ability to think through cause-and-effect relationships, reach sound historical interpretations, and conduct historical inquiries and research leading to the knowledge on which informed decisions in contemporary life are based. The standards documents outline five areas in which students should develop such competence. These are:

- chronological thinking, which involves developing a clear sense of historical time;
- historical comprehension, including the ability to read historical narratives, identify basic elements of the narrative structure, and describe the past through the perspectives of those who were there;
- historical analysis and interpretation;

- historical research, which involves formulating historical questions, determining historical time and context, judging credibility and authority of sources, and constructing historical narratives or arguments; and

- historical issues-analysis and decision-making, including the ability to identify problems, analyze points of view, and decide whether actions and decisions were good or bad (National Center for History in the Schools, 1994).

The authors contend that these standards should be expected of all students and that all students should be provided equal access to the educational opportunities necessary to achieve them. However, the standards documents contain no specific guidelines for how to ensure equal access for English language learners, and fail to offer guidance on how teachers of English language learners can help their students meet these newly created goals.

Making Social Studies Content Accessible to English Language Learners

A good example of how content standards can incorporate what is known about exemplary instruction for English language learners comes from the national English Language Arts (ELA) standards. The guidelines encourage teachers to adopt instructional approaches that help make literary material more comprehensible to their ELL students, and to actively teach strategies that show students how to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate a range of texts (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996). Demonstrating the use of graphic organizers, for example, is an effective way to help students visualize and classify content, characters, ideas, plot or theme. Working with word clusters, semantic maps and webs, storyboards, Venn diagrams and similar graphic organizers also allows students to express difficult ideas by reformulating abstract information into concrete form (Sasser, 1992). Moreover, teacher explanation and modeling of reading strategies encourages students to explicitly focus on the ways in which they draw meaning from a text, and to use that knowledge across the curriculum.

All students, including English language learners, should be given equal access to the educational opportunities necessary to meet the new history standards.

The idea that ELA and other content standards should reflect knowledge of effective ELL instruction was a key recommendation of one of the early contributors to current national content standards, the Stanford Working Group on Federal Education

Programs for Limited English Proficient Students (August, Hakuta, & Pompa, 1994). Their report suggested a comprehensive focus on the needs of ELLs, and the importance of depicting the broad cultural and linguistic diversity, or multiculturalism, of this country. An overriding difficulty for standards developers, though, has been how best to incorporate multicultural content and exactly what multicultural issues to address. "Do we look at history and talk about all of the warts? Do we include women and minorities? Do we make them part of the history or side bars?" (K. Steeves, personal communication, February, 1997). Simply adding a "multicultural day" or ethnic food festival to the curriculum is not enough since it does not involve students in thinking deeply about the meaning of cultural and linguistic differences (Farr & Trumbull, 1997). A truly multicultural history curriculum allows teachers to build on the cultural and world knowledge of their English language learners through a gradual, flexible process of exploration.

Adopt a Flexible, Thematic-Based Curriculum

A recent analysis of the ways in which mainstream classrooms and ESL classrooms differ (Harklau, 1994) has implications for multicultural curriculum planning and the components that make up an effective program. Adaptability was found to be a key factor, with the constantly shifting needs of the ELL population calling for flexible guidelines and autonomy in setting course curriculum. The ESL teachers studied responded to the changing needs of their students by developing a spiral syllabus and unit-based approach to curriculum that could be easily adjusted up or down, or supplemented, depending on the class (Harklau, 1994).

Thematically organized curricula have been found to work well with English language learners.

Also effective is the use of thematic units as the predominant mode of organizing curriculum (Farr & Trumbull, 1997). The thematic approach is especially powerful in integrating instruction across disciplines since lessons can be designed to help students make connections and achieve a deeper understanding of a concept from several disciplinary views. *School Reform and Student Diversity: Case Studies of Exemplary Practices for LEP Students*, for example, describes one middle school's use of thematic instruction to unify social studies and language arts. Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech served as the focus for a unit on dreams and the ways in which they are realized. As part of the unit, students interviewed immigrants using questions developed in class, wrote essays about the immigrants' experiences, and investigated the immigrants' dreams concerning the U.S. (Berman et al., 1995).

Mainstream teachers working with ELLs may need to adopt similar approaches to curricula, rather than the usual fixed, grade-level guidelines.

Give Students Adequate Time to Learn Social Studies Content

Effective social studies curricula emphasize depth of coverage over breadth.

Along with a multicultural, thematic perspective, an effective social studies curriculum would allow students the time to achieve a thorough understanding of key concepts. A curriculum that emphasizes superficial coverage of many topics does not give students the chance to fully comprehend important ideas or develop the thinking skills required for advanced study. Moreover, curriculum in social studies, as in many other subject areas, depends on continuity, with content in any one course building upon content supposedly mastered in previous courses (Harklau, 1994). Most secondary English language learners have not had eight or nine years of instruction in U.S. elementary and middle schools, and their prior knowledge will be different from that of their peers. As learning theorists and researchers have known for years, a learning situation is meaningful only if the learners can relate the new learning task to what they already know. Furthermore, having to decipher unfamiliar vocabulary and linguistic constructions can impede anyone's ability to understand new concepts, and especially those students who are below grade level academically (King et al., 1992).

Link Social Studies Concepts to Prior Knowledge

Utilizing students' experiential knowledge is a key factor in successful curriculum development for English language learners.

One of the more encouraging approaches to social studies curriculum design starts with the assumption that the learner has little or no previous content knowledge, and uses basic, familiar concepts to gradually develop related ideas into broader units of academic study. For example, prior to beginning study of the American Civil War, class discussion may center on students' personal experiences and problems with being different, or on the notion that differences can lead to conflict. Extending this understanding into social, political, and economic differences among groups of people, and specifically between the North and the South prior to the Civil War, are logical next steps. Finally, the Civil War itself can be introduced within a context made rich by personal stories and broad-based content knowledge. In this way, teachers can utilize students' experiential knowledge by relating it to important social studies concepts and events. Similarly, a unit on westward movement in the U.S. devel-

oped within the context of larger patterns of migration and immigration can lead ELLs to explore how they fit into these patterns of movement as newcomers to the U.S. (King et al, 1992).

Linking students' prior knowledge to the curriculum is, in fact, the emphasis of the oral history approach, with students' backgrounds and experiences forming the raw historical data from which a social studies curriculum can be built (Olmedo, 1993). Oral history projects help students understand that history is composed of stories in which they and their families have participated. Complex issues, such as religious persecution, tyranny of autocratic rulers, and the rights and responsibilities of self-governance, are more accessible when developed from students' backgrounds and experiences. Moreover, in working with data obtained from oral histories, students will be engaging in many of the historical thinking skills outlined in the U.S. history standards, i.e., chronological thinking, reading historical narratives, describing the past through the perspectives of those who were there, and historical analysis and interpretation. In addition, oral histories serve as an avenue through which students can strengthen their own emerging language skills. Interviewing and presenting information to classmates can improve oral proficiency, while translating and transcribing oral interviews into English develops literacy. Using an oral history approach also serves to promote parental involvement in student learning, native language use in meeting instructional goals, validation of the student's culture and experience, and enhancement of self esteem— all critical factors in the academic achievement of English language learners (Olmedo, 1993). The nine steps on page eight illustrate this incremental approach.

Accommodate a Variety of Learning Styles

Another important strategy for social studies teachers working with English language learners is the use of visuals and realia that transcend language barriers and support individual learning styles. Prints and picture sets relating to specific themes are useful for conveying information and inducing critical thinking (King et al., 1992). Historical artifacts can be used to assess prior knowledge and encourage questions, both of which are integral to the inquiry process. Artifacts such as costumes, tools, photographs, record books, wills, written documents and other objects encourage students to begin thinking about their own family history and to consider artifacts their own families may possess. Bringing in artifacts from home also motivates students to use higher order thinking skills to make sense of data, and to generalize about a particular historical period. Once students view history from a more personal perspective,

Steps in Implementing an Oral History Approach

1. Identify which social studies concepts to teach.

   Some common concepts taken from the National Council for the Social Studies Task Force on Scope and Sequence (1989), include: dependence and interdependence, the interaction of human beings and their environment, resource development and use, scarcity, migration, acculturation, the impact of economic or technological changes on societies, issues of war causes and results.

2. Develop questions or an interview guide jointly with students that can be used to interview family members, neighbors, or someone in the ethnic community.

3. Translate or assist students in translating interview questions into the students' native languages.

4. Provide training and practice in using tape recorders and in conducting interviews.

5. Invite a guest speaker from the community to be interviewed by the class as a practice activity.

6. Have students select an interviewee.

7. Assign students or small groups the tasks of interviewing, transcribing or summarizing the [interview] tape, and sharing knowledge gained with the class.

8. Create a list of themes from the students' interviews and use them along with portions of the text or other classroom materials to reinforce social studies concepts.

9. Finally, have students compare and contrast the experiences of their interviewees with information learned from reading historical biographies, excerpts from texts, and other source materials.

(Olmedo, 1993)

and as a subject relevant to their own lives, they can begin to build concepts of what a particular era means.

Preservice teachers in The George Washington University social studies education program are encouraged to use historical artifacts to initiate the inquiry process, a particularly effective approach with students from other countries and cultures who may be able to share items that provide a different perspective on history. English language learners benefit, too, by having their contributions acknowledged and respected as important parts of the curriculum (K. Steeves, personal communication, February, 1997), and by interacting with their native English speaking peers in cooperative, academic situations (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996).

Use Cooperative Learning Strategies

Interactive, cooperative learning offers ELLs the opportunity to communicate their thoughts and ideas in a supportive and nonthreatening environment, and to receive instruction from their peers that is individually tailored to their language ability and academic needs. Working in cooperative learning groups also increases the variety of ways information can be presented and related to what is already known. Furthermore, active listening and speaking in cooperative settings provides a rich language environment for both comprehensible input and practice in speaking that students cannot get in a more traditional classroom environment (Olsen, 1992). It is important, though, to prevent cooperative learning from degenerating into groups where the best students do all the work, and ELLs are observers rather than participants (McPartland & Braddock II, 1993). The vignette opposite is an example of a social studies cooperative learning activity structured so that all students must participate and different points of view are developed.

Cooperative learning strategies highlight ELLs strengths while targeting their weaknesses.

Within a social studies classroom, communication in small groups can assume many forms, one of which is role playing, a widely used strategy for fostering the development of communication skills. Students might be asked to assume certain historical perspectives and to problem solve from those perspectives. For example, groups could function as American Indian tribal councils in order to examine a political issue facing that council during a particular historical period. As with more structured cooperative learning activities, role-plays allow students the opportunity to practice a variety of communication skills, such as reporting a group decision or presenting findings to the class (K. Steeves, personal communication, February, 1997).

Social Studies Cooperative Learning Activity: Creative Controversy

[Students are divided into home teams and] given two maps and two readings that give different answers to the question, "Who discovered America?" Depending on ability levels (language and knowledge), students might master their parts individually, in pairs, or in temporary expert groups of students from all the home teams who have the same map or reading. If expert teams are homogeneous for language, the native language can be used; if heterogeneous, more proficient English speakers can explain and clarify for the less fluent. Upon returning to home teams, each student must argue for his/her explanation of who discovered America. The cooperative learning structure roundtable can be used to ensure that all team members offer their information. In a roundtable, there is one piece of paper and one pen for each group. Each student makes a contribution in writing then passes the paper and pen to the next student. This activity can also be done orally (Olsen, 1992).

Linking Instruction to Assessment

Putting in place an effective program of instruction requires the kinds of authentic and meaningful instruction discussed here, along with equally authentic and meaningful assessment. Assessment that requires students to perform academic tasks similar to those originally used to teach the material, such as the oral history projects, team tasks and role plays described earlier, provide an effective alternative to standardized, multiple choice tests, which tend to underestimate ELLs knowledge of academic content. An additional advantage of using authentic assessment is that it allows teachers and students the opportunity to track academic achievement throughout the school year. When a number of activities or tasks are combined, they are typically organized in a portfolio, with teachers and students periodically discussing which samples of student work to include and how well students are progressing (Chamot, 1993).

Along with authenticity, a good assessment plan for ELL students has all or most of the following attributes:

- Tests for both content knowledge and language proficiency;
- Assesses students' content knowledge and abilities in the native language as well as in English;

- Uses a diversity of measures, e.g., portfolios, observations, anecdotal records, interviews, checklists, and criterion-referenced tests, to measure content knowledge and skills;
- Ensures teacher awareness of the purpose of the assessment, e.g., whether the test is intended to measure verbal or writing skills, language proficiency or content knowledge;
- Takes into account students' backgrounds, including their educational experiences and parents' literacy (August & Pease-Alvarez , 1996);
- Adds context to assessment tasks with familiar visual prompts, questions for small group discussion and individual writing; and activities that mirror learning processes with which students are familiar;
- Includes administration procedures to match classroom instructional practices, e.g., cooperative small groups, individual conferences, and assessment in the language of instruction;
- Allows extra time to complete or respond to assessment tasks; and
- Makes other accommodations, such as permitting students to use dictionaries or word lists (Navarrete & Gustkee, 1996).

Characteristics of Effective Mainstream Teacher Preparation

Research suggests that mainstream teachers who receive appropriate training in how to teach ELLs are better able to create instructional environments supportive of second language and content learning (Castaneda, 1993). A training program initiated in the Chicago Public Schools, for example, improved the instructional competencies of mainstream teachers who work with diverse learners by encouraging collaboration among staff, and instructing all staff in applicable approaches. The Chicago program addressed a number of important training issues, including:

- Adapting mainstream lessons and materials to meet the needs of ELL students;
- Assessing and grading ELL students;
- Distinguishing between language difficulties and learning problems;
- Incorporating ESL methods into the mainstream classroom;
- Making academic English more comprehensible by teaching specific learning strategies;

- Managing [multiple-level] classrooms; and
- Using cooperative learning strategies to encourage interaction between ELL and native English speaking students (Sakash & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995)

Many education departments, though, have not incorporated relevant coursework into their programs, believing that ELL students who enter the mainstream classroom should be ready to learn academic content in English (Constantino, 1994). There has also been little research to assist teacher educators in preparing secondary teachers to work with ELLs. What is needed is a comprehensive curriculum in which all aspects of the education program — coursework and field experiences — involve preservice teachers in developing the skills and knowledge necessary for successful practice in diverse classrooms (Chisholm, 1994). An effective curriculum would provide preservice teachers with the following:

- A repertoire of methods and skills for adapting instruction to the needs of ELL students;
- Alternative strategies for assessing student progress;
- A sound basis in testing methods, interpretation of test results, and ethnographic and observational techniques;
- Ability to recognize cultural bias in tests and to use valid and culturally sensitive assessment measures;
- Proficiency in assessing software for the accuracy of its cultural content as well as for its educational merit;
- Ways to incorporate differences in cognitive and learning styles into classroom instruction;
- Understanding of cultural differences; and
- Information on the contributions of linguistically and culturally diverse peoples to the content areas (Chisholm, 1994).

Moreover, education programs serious about training teachers to work with ELL students would provide them with practical experiences that allow them to observe effective teachers, practice teaching in multicultural environments, and reflect with their peers and collaborating teachers on their developing skills and cultural competencies (Chisholm, 1994).

Conclusion

Setting high academic content standards for history has created a challenge for every student and teacher, a challenge to meet a more rigorous and specific set of learning goals. Moreover, attainment of these goals requires a significant shift in the way educators, both within middle and high schools and within colleges and universities, think about their students and practice their profession. Just as the new history standards require all students to meet higher levels of achievement, they require all teachers to be responsible for and capable of educating a diverse population of learners. Particularly exceptional education programs, for their part, will go beyond the addition of one or two ESL methods or culture courses, and develop a comprehensive curriculum that instills in our future teachers cultural self-awareness, an appreciation of diversity, and the capacity to address the needs of their diverse students.

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Resources

Content Standards for Social Studies

The information in this report focuses on the content standards that have been developed for U.S. history. Below is a listing of additional resources related to the U.S. history standards, and to some of the other content areas within social studies.

Civics and Government

Center for Civic Government. (1994). *National standards for civics and government.* <http://www.civiced.org> or (202) 861-8800.

Economics

National Council on Economic Education, National Association of Economic Educators, & Foundation for Teaching Economics. (1997). *Voluntary national content standards in economics.* <http://www.nationalcouncil.org> or (800) 338-1192.

Geography

Geography Education Standards Project, National Council for Geographic Education. (1994). *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards in 1994.* <http://www.ncge.org> or (724) 357-6290.

History

National Center for History in the Schools. (1995; 1996). *National standards for United States history for grades K-4, National standards for United States history for grades 5-12, and National standards for world history* (a three-volume set). <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/> or (310) 825-4702.

Social Studies

National Council for the Social Studies. (1994). *Expectations for excellence: Curriculum standards for social studies.* <http://www.ncss.org> or (202) 966-7840.

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